



CONGRESSIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS

Joaquin Castro | Chairman

116TH CONGRESS

April 22, 2020

Honorable Bobby Scott
Chairman
Education and Labor Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Scott:

Throughout the time of the COVID-19 health crisis, food processing workers have been critical to our nation's health and well-being. While most Americans have stepped away from the public sphere in order to stay safe at home, food processing workers must continue to work tirelessly to ensure that every American families still has the food they need for every meal. The Education and Labor Committee has worked tirelessly to help provide these workers as well as other essential workers are given the proper protective gear that they need to keep doing their job in a safe and healthy manner.

However, as we work to help bring stronger protections to everyone, especially essential workers during this crisis, companies across the meat processing industry have not taken the necessary precautions they need to protect workers. Instead, we have seen that plants are closing after several thousand workers have tested positive for COVID-19 and a dozen workers died. These billion-dollar companies that employ tens of thousands of workers chose not to properly inform their workers (who speak about 30 different language) about the virus or its presence at the plant and chose not to institute protective measures until after workers became ill.^[1]

It has long been known that meat processing jobs are some of the most dangerous in the nation. Workers struggle through long hours under stressful and hazardous conditions. For example, meat processing workers are exposed to biological agents, even some that are resistant to antibiotics, they are at increased risk of lung cancer,^[2] and meatpacking workers face illness rates at 17 times the rate of other industries.^[3] According to OSHA's safe work practices, these workers should have already been provided appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), including waterproof gloves, facemasks, and goggles, which companies failed to provide even during a health crisis.^[4] COVID-19 has brought

^[1] <https://civileats.com/2020/04/17/poor-conditions-at-meatpacking-plants-have-long-put-workers-at-risk-the-pandemic-makes-it-much-worse/>

^[2] https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/meatpacking/hazards_solutions.html

^[3] <https://www.bls.gov/iif/>

^[4] https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/meatpacking/hazards_solutions.html

to light the hazardous and life-threatening conditions that meat processing workers are exposed to everyday.

Many of these workers are extremely vulnerable immigrants who are risking their lives to bring food to our families and friends. Additionally, when these workers are exploited and companies refuse to provide their workers with proper PPE, we also risk our nation's food supply. Once face masks and gloves run out across the food supply chain, meat, poultry, seafood, and processed eggs would become scarce within a period of two to four weeks.^[5] The safety of all workers in the food processing industry, must be paramount.

We urge you to bring this issue to the forefront of our committee by immediately opening a congressional investigation and holding a roundtable or forum. In addition, we urge you to hold a hearing on the working conditions for meat processing workers during COVID-19, once Members of Congress are able to return to regular order in Washington, D.C. because COVID-19 is no longer of immediate concern to the health and safety of Members and their staff. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Kaitlyn Montan at Kaitlyn.Montan@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,

Joaquin Castro
Chairman
Congressional Hispanic Caucus

Raúl M. Grijalva
Chair
CHC Education and Labor Taskforce

Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan
Member of Congress

Lori Trahan
Member of Congress

^[5] <https://civileats.com/2020/04/17/poor-conditions-at-meatpacking-plants-have-long-put-workers-at-risk-the-pandemic-makes-it-much-worse/>